



Hello, Houseguests!

Visitors heading your way?
Here's how to prep your place for a happy stay
without exhausting yourself.

by **JESSICA PRESS**

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MY SISTER-IN-LAW,

Deb Sindler, is a veritable hosting goddess. A mom of three in Pittsburgh, she and her ever-gracious husband welcome family and friends for weekends, weeks, sometimes months—all while remaining totally chill.

I, on the other hand, start panicking the minute friends mention they might be anywhere near my zip code. Are my toilets clean enough? What do the visiting kids eat for breakfast? How can I mask the marker/slime/glitter stains on our secondhand IKEA dining table? Will they scoff at my tacky taste in coffee? And where will everyone put their stuff? The (first-world) stress of it all is enough to make me want to splurge on a hotel gift card and send them packing.

But as my family and I head into our first holiday season as homeowners, I decided to finally conquer my hosting anxiety. So I reached out to hospitality pros and experienced hosts for the most effective, most realistic tips for making my home ready for family and friends—without going bananas. Read on for their valuable insights from what you can do in advance to last-minute tweaks that'll make any guest feel right at home.

PREP

Stock up on these supplies now to spare yourself the last-minute drugstore runs once everyone has arrived.

● Boost your tech.

Gather up extra phone chargers, night-lights, and a power strip for the guest bedroom. Or get 'em cheap at your nearest dollar store, if you don't have spares, suggests Philadelphia professional organizer Carrie Kauffman. Display your Wi-Fi network name and password in places that guests can see, such as on their bedside table and on your refrigerator.

● Get hooked.

"Hooks are so important for visitors!" raves Nina Gottlieb, director of design at West Elm Hotels. Install two in each guest bedroom and bathroom for hanging wet towels, jackets, bags, and more.

● Provide makeup-removing wipes.

Leaving a pack of these in your bathroom will keep your towels from getting destroyed and are all-around appreciated by guests, says Shelly Leibham, owner and general manager of Austin's Hotel Eleven.

● Stock the pantry.

Ask about guests' food preferences before they arrive so that you can stock the fridge accordingly, suggests Maggie Fuller, a mom and a bed-and-breakfast owner in Savannah. This is helpful with babies just starting to eat solids who might need more oatmeal and bananas than you're used to!

● Lighten their load.

If your sister's coming with a baby or a toddler (or both!), ask her for the kids' diaper sizes. Having a box and some wipes for her will feel like a godsend.



Guests may be too shy to rifle through the pantry, so leave snacks out that say, "Please eat me!"

CLEAN

Grab your partner, cue up Spotify, and get ready to scrub like the pros do.

● Freshen the room!

"The best housekeepers will always enter a room and open all the windows," says Sean Nies, a senior member of the housekeeping team at The Hotel Hershey.

● Dust up and down.

People don't think about cleaning the top of headboards and lights, but they collect a lot of dust. A two-sided microfiber dusting mitt makes the job go fast. Wipe the baseboards a day before guests arrive.

● Use a lint brush as a bathroom-cleaning tool.

Roll your brush over areas where lint, dust, and hair tend to build up, says Leibham. Think: near the toilet and along the perimeter where your tile meets the baseboards.

● Don't skip the faucet...

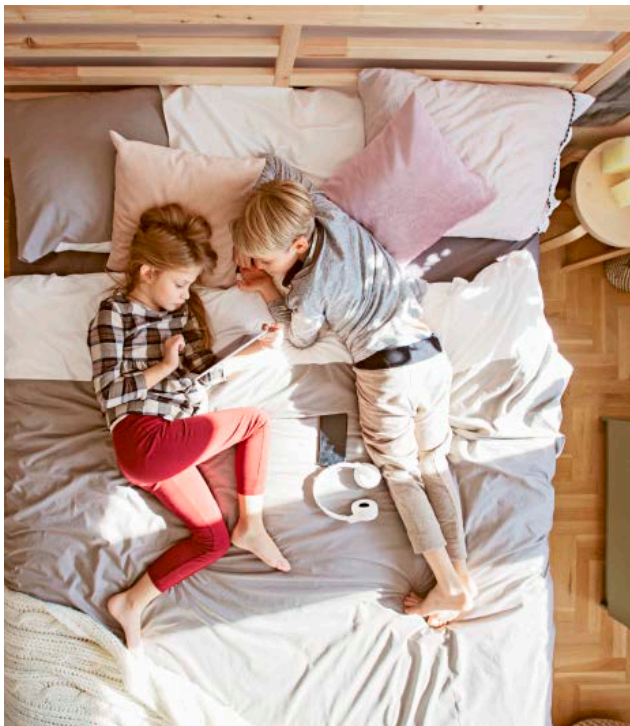
The most commonly overlooked part of a sink is the spout where the water actually comes out, says Leibham. Wipe it with a clean brush to give your bathroom instant polish.

● ...or this crevice.

To really get a clean toilet, kneel down—most nonprofessional cleaners miss the spot where the toilet seat connects with the commode, which can be just plain filthy. And don't forget to clean the flusher handle!

● Put out an extra plunger and toilet brush in your guests' bathroom.

It spares guests potential awkwardness—and can save your plumbing.



WELCOME

These little fixes will make your guests more comfortable, keep their rooms tidy, and save them from constantly having to ask you for help.

● **Give luggage a home.** No one wants to be tripping over luggage. To prevent the usual unzipped-bags-all-over-the-floor scenario, carve out space under the bed or in the closet for suitcases and bags, or buy a luggage rack.

● **Make space for their tchotchkes.** Clear off the top of a dresser or a desktop for guests to organize their smaller items: jewelry, wallet, loose change, whatever's been floating around in their pockets all day.

● **Add a personal touch.** Kauffman likes to leave out photos of her guests, like childhood pics of her and her brother or yearbooks for her bestie of 20-plus years, recalling memories from when they were younger. "It's a simple way to show them how happy you are they came all

the way to see you, and it's so much fun to go down memory lane," she says.

● **Color-code your towels.** Designate a towel color for guests that's different from the ones your family uses. This will help keep them separated. But don't worry about a different color for each person. People generally don't mind if their towels get mixed up within their own family, says Meredith Barnett, a mom of three, who has a revolving door of guests at her vacation home.

● **Play barista and set up a beverage center.** Everyone's got some kind of morning shtick—whether it's needing caffeine first thing to function or craving a specific tea or creamer. Have it all ready to go so that early risers can feel like themselves if they wake up before you.

CONNECT

Do these things to help make the visit fun for everyone—yourself included.

● **Promise treats.** Send a text telling your guests you're eager for their arrival and that goodies like strong coffee, ice cream, and bourbon will be waiting for them. It'll make airport security or traffic more endurable.

● **Have small gifts waiting,** suggests Charles Fisher, a dad of two and the resort manager of the Four Seasons Resort in Orlando. Offer kids presents of the craft or activity variety to give them something to do during lulls (read: free you to sit and chat with your sis).

● **Make time for self-care.** It may be hard with people staying in your home, but self-care can be as simple as doing some deep breathing in the shower. Anything you can do to get centered before you're juggling your guests will help, says psychotherapist and mom Perri Shaw Borish.

● **Don't try to do it all!** You're not running a B&B, so outsource chores when you can. Order in pizza or take the kids out for pancakes. And remember: Most guests want to feel useful, so let them set the table or strip their beds. When you feel overwhelmed, remind yourself that no visit's success hinges on how clean your toilets are or how crisp your linens may be. Sure, my sister-in-law inevitably manages to check all the boxes on her list, but her natural hospitality has more to do with her hosting philosophy than her Swiffer skills: "It's all about the traditions and memories we're creating for our kids," she says. "Time together with family and friends will truly stay with them." 🍷

Your Happy Hostess Tool Kit



Folding Luggage Rack With Striped Webbing, \$73; thestripescompany.us



Cordinate Décor Extension Cord With 3 Polarized Outlets, \$11; byjasco.com



Wood & Wool Hook, \$16; containerstore.com



Evercare Pet Ergo Grip Lint Roller, \$8.50 for twin pack; target.com